

The violence in Tucson, Arizona -- including the shooting of my friend Rep. Gabby Giffords -- is not a time for partisanship or politics. The violence, however, does require reflection. Here are my reflections.

First, I know Gabby pretty well. I was with her in New York on the day her husband, Mark Kelly, proposed to her. Mark kept telling me that Gabby would have to leave our meetings early. I kept replying that she could not. Finally, Mark told me there was no choice. The next day I learned why: He took her to the Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point and popped the question. Many Americans are now learning that Mark is a decorated Naval officer and space shuttle astronaut. Few know that he proposed to her on Long Island.

Second reflection: my guess is that despite the horror inflicted on Gabby, she would be upset with the attention she is getting. She would be more concerned with the 9-year-old girl who died...and the congressional outreach director who was killed...and the federal judge...and the others who were simply doing what involved Americans do: meeting their Representative in their neighborhood.

Third: I hope we will have an honest reflection on how it was that a deranged individual known to police, who was expelled from college because of violent tendencies, was able to walk into a gun store and successfully arm himself to the hilt and then snuff out innocent lives. I support responsible gun ownership. But even the most ardent supporters of "gun rights" owe it to our safety and their own to ask some honest questions: Did the system work? Should it be that easy for someone known to have made threatening statements, to have had police interactions and a violent streak, to be able to buy a 9 mm Glock? If it could happen in a Safeway in Tucson, couldn't it happen at a supermarket here? Isn't there a responsible and common sense way to stop this from happening again without resorting to sound bites about taking guns away from responsible gun owners?

Finally, I reject the notion that Members of Congress should ramp up security or reduce public exposure. Representative democracy requires access. However, I do hope that my colleagues and the political pundits on both sides of the aisle will be more careful about overheated rhetoric. Words have consequences. Symbols -- like superimposing gun crosshairs over Members of Congress or their districts -- have meaning. I do hope they will find ways to disagree without vilifying those with whom they disagree. I do hope they will stop questioning one's patriotism or loyalty. I hope we will begin treating our opinions as opinions rather than threats to the survival of the nation.

On Saturday, Gabby Giffords and her staffers in Tucson were doing their jobs. And my staff and I will continue doing ours. This weekend, several constituents asked me what they could do in light of the violence we saw in Tucson. Here are two simple requests: When you do see or call my congressional staff, please thank them for working for you. And pray for Gabby Giffords' recovery and return to the House of Representatives.